MARVEL COMICS

SPIDER-MAN

DEC '96 4

BURNING BRIGHT!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

SPIDER-MAN®: REDEMPTION

I WAS BORN IN A SEA OF *FIRE*.

BOILING CHEMICALS MELTING MY GENETIC STRUCTURE, MOLDING ME...

...INTO WHAT ***HE*** WANTED: A ***CLONE*** OF THE MAN HE HATED MOST IN ALL THE WORLD.

CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING BORN A GROWN MAN-- WITH NO CLEAR MEMORIES... JUST VAGUE INTIMATIONS OF A PAST NEVER LIVED?

IMAGINE OPENING YOUR EYES FOR THE FIRST TIME--AND GAZING AT THE FACE OF THE DEVIL.

MY FATHER: MILES WARREN, ***THE JACKAL.***

BUT HE WAS THE ONLY FATHER I HAD...

...AND I WAS HIS ONLY ***SON.***

AND LIKE ALL SONS I CRAVED MY FATHER'S APPROVAL, HIS ACCEPTANCE. HIS ***LOVE.***

FOR A TIME--I RECEIVED IT. BUT ONLY...

...FOR A TIME.

WHEN HE DISCOVERED THAT I WAS *IMPERFECT*, THAT MY CELLS WERE SLOWLY DEGENERATING, THAT I COULD NO LONGER SERVE HIS PLANS...

...MY FATHER *CAST ME OUT.*

I'VE BEEN LEARNING EVER SINCE.

I WAS BORN IN A SEA OF *FIRE*...

I LEARNED THEN THAT THE WORLD WAS CRUEL--AND MEN'S HEARTS WERE COLD. I LEARNED THEN ABOUT SUFFERING AND STRUGGLE.

...AND THE FIRE IS WHERE I INTENDED TO DIE.

SPIDER-MAN: REDEMPTION

by J.M. DEMATTEIS, MIKE ZECK, & BOB McLEOD

Chapter Four: Burning Bright

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WHY AM I DOING THIS?

THE BOMB THAT TURNED THIS DINER INTO AN INFERNO-- WAS MY HANDIWORK...

...YET HERE I AM-- STRUGGLING TO SAVE THESE PEOPLE.

ALL MY SHORT LIFE-- MY HEART HAS BEEN DEAD. COLD. HATE HAS BEEN THE FORCE THAT'S FUELED MY EXISTENCE.

WHY THIS SUDDEN OUTPOURING OF COMPASSION?

OR IS IT COMPASSION? PERHAPS...

...IT'S ONLY MADNESS.

IS--IS THAT ALL OF 'EM?

THERE ARE TWO MORE.

YOU GOIN' IN T' GET THEM, TOO?

NO.

I'M GOING IN TO PERISH WITH THEM.

I SEE NOW THAT IT'S NEITHER MADNESS NOR COMPASSION. JUST... PRACTICALITY. THE BOMB WASN'T MEANT FOR THOSE PEOPLE OUT THERE.

IT WAS MEANT ONLY FOR ME...

...AND THE TWO PEOPLE...

...WHOSE DESTINIES ARE INEXTRICABLY BOUND WITH MINE:

BEN REILLY-- THE SOURCE OF MY LIFE AND PAIN, THE GENETIC TEMPLATE FROM WHICH I WAS CLONED...

...AND HIS BELOVED JANINE.

STILL ALIVE I SEE.

BEN... HE WAS HIT BY SOME FALLING DEBRIS... BUT I MANAGED TO DRAG HIM INTO THE TUNNEL THAT YOU DUG--

--BUT MOST OF IT'S COL-LAPSED, KAINE! WE'RE GOING TO DIE IN HERE UNLESS YOU--

OF COURSE WE'RE GOING TO DIE IN HERE. THAT'S WHAT I WANT. AN ENDING TO THESE YEARS OF LUNACY. A FINAL PEACE-- FOR THREE TORMENTED SOULS.

I NEVER INTENDED TO HURT YOU, JANINE--

--BUT I SEE NOW... THAT YOUR LIFE IS AS MUCH A SAD MISTAKE AS MINE OR REILLY'S. THIS WORLD ISN'T FOR YOU--

IT ISN'T FOR ANY OF US.

EMBRACE THE FLAMES. WELCOME DEATH.

I DON'T CARE IF I DIE. MY LIFE ENDED THE DAY I KILLED MY FATHER. BUT, BEN--

--HE'S A GOOD MAN! A KIND AND DECENT MAN!

YOU'RE PART OF HIM! YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING IS TRUE!

TAKE ME-- BUT LET BEN LIVE! LET HIM--

N-NO...!

THIS WAR... HAS ALWAYS BEEN... BETWEEN US, KAINE.

WHY TAKE... AN INNOCENT VICTIM... DOWN WITH US?

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. MAY-BE MEN LIKE US...

...WEREN'T MEANT FOR THIS WORLD. MAYBE--

--WE BELONG TO THE FLAMES.

BUT JANINE--

ALL SHE'S EVER KNOWN IN HER LIFE... IS SUFFERING. HER FATHER TORTURED HER... ABUSED HER!

YOU... OF ALL PEOPLE... UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT'S LIKE!

SHE DESERVES ANOTHER CHANCE, KAINE!

I'M BEGGING YOU--

--WITH ALL MY HEART--

--PLEASE--

PLEASE!

LET HER LIVE!

SHAK-

KROOOM!

NO ONE COULDA MADE IT THROUGH THAT! NO ONE!

THAT POOR GUY... HE--

HEY!

HEY, LOOK!

UP THERE!

GO. LOVE EACH OTHER.

FIND WHAT SHREDS OF HAPPINESS YOU CAN IN THIS WRETCHED WORLD.

ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU DO ONE THING FOR ME--BEFORE YOU LEAVE.

KILL ME.

NO.

I CAN'T THANK YOU *ENOUGH*, KAINE--FOR WHAT YOU'VE *DONE*.

AND I *CERTAINLY* CAN'T *KILL* YOU.

BUT--I CAN'T JUST WALK *AWAY*, EITHER.

YOU'RE A WANTED MURDERER. I'M *SORRY*--

--BUT I HAVE TO TAKE YOU *IN*.

THAK!

YOU THINK I'M GOING TO MARCH OFF TO JAIL LIKE SOME GOOD LITTLE SOLDIER?

I MAY HAVE BEEN AN IDIOT TO SAVE YOU, REILLY--

--BUT I'M NO FOOL!

KAINE...I DON'T WANT THIS!

"I DON'T WANT OUR WAR TO GO ON!"

WAIT A MINUTE! THE BIG GUY--I RECOGNIZE HIM! IT WAS AT THE PARKER TRIAL! HE--

UH-OH.

"UH-OH" WHAT, DETECTIVE?

UH-OH--

"--THAT'S KAINE!"

IF YOU REALLY ARE A PART OF ME...IF SOME SMALL SPARK OF ME IS BURNING INSIDE YOU--

--THEN YOU KNOW THAT IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO!

GIVE YOURSELF UP! ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

THAT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU'LL FIND THE PEACE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, KAINE!

"THAT'S THE ONLY WAY!"

WE NEED BACK-UP! LOTS OF IT!

MOVE...MOVE! THAT GUY'S A MANIAC!

I WATCHED THEM BATTLING... LISTENING TO BEN'S WORDS.

WORDS MEANT FOR KAINE...

KAAAK!!

SPAAK!

...THAT PIERCED MY HEART...

...AND SHOOK MY SOUL.

DON'T YOU REALIZE, BEN--THAT I'VE BEEN IN JAIL EVER SINCE I WAS BORN? EVERY DAY HAS BEEN MY PRISON! EVERY NIGHT, MY PUNISHMENT!

I'VE PAID FOR MY SINS! WHAT I WANT NOW IS REST! WHAT I WANT NOW IS--

HOLD IT!

DON'T MOVE, KAINE! NOT A MUSCLE!

--DEATH.

LET'S DO THIS THE EASY WAY, OK? LET'S NOT HAVE ANY MORE TROUBLE!

NOW STEP AWAY FROM HIM, NICE AND--

I CAME TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT KAINE IN THAT ONE NIGHT...

AAAA

4KOW
4KOW
4KOW

SHIK

SHIK

GRRRRR

KRAAAK

SO DID BEN.

KAINE--THERE'S GOT TO BE ANOTHER WAY!

DON'T DO THIS--

KAINE!!

IF BEN WOULDN'T BE THE INSTRUMENT OF HIS DEATH--THEN KAINE WAS GOING TO FIND ANOTHER WAY.

DESPITE ALL HE'D DONE, I WAS OVERWHELMED WITH PITY FOR HIM: HE'D BEEN TOUCHED, SO DEEPLY, BY OUR LOVE...AND YET HE COULDN'T FIND AN IOTA OF LOVE ...FOR HIMSELF.

SOMEWHERE INSIDE HIM, HE STILL HEARD HIS FATHER'S VOICE-- CALLING HIM FLAWED, WORTHLESS. UNWORTHY OF LOVE.

HE'S GOT A COP UP THERE--AND HE'S KILLED COPS BEFORE!

THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF SCUM THAT NEGOTIATES--SO THE FIRST CLEAR SHOT YOU'VE GOT--

--TAKE THAT ANIMAL DOWN!

I KNEW THAT VOICE, ALL TOO WELL. AND I KNEW THE DEPTHS ...THE DEPRAVITY...

"Perfect c... time after...

I'M GOING TO BREAK HIS NECK! I'M GOING TO RIP OUT HIS HEART!

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...IT COULD DRIVE A PERSON TO.

I SHOULD'VE MOVED FASTER ...I SHOULD'VE STOPPED HIM BEFORE HE--

YOU'RE STILL DAZED FROM WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DINER--

IT'S A WONDER HE DIDN'T KILL YOU WHILE YOU WERE FIGHTING!

HE COULD HAVE KILLED ME, JANINE. WE'D BOTH BE DEAD NOW--IF IT WASN'T FOR HIM.

WE'VE GOT TO GO, BEN! IF ANY OF THESE POLICEMEN RECOGNIZE ME--!

BUT, IF I UNDERSTOOD...

...WHY WERE MY FIRST THOUGHTS ONLY OF MYSELF?

LET THE OFFICER GO, KAINE!

YOU'RE TRAPPED! THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF THIS!

YES, THERE IS!

I GUESS... FEAR DIES A SLOW DEATH. BUT THANK GOD...

TAK TAK TAK TAK TAK TAK

SHKOW SHKOW SHKOW SHKOW

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POLICE

POLICE

...IT DIES.

For a moment, I was frozen--unable to ACT. Unsure of what to do.

I couldn't let Kaine die--but I couldn't abandon the woman I loved more than life ITSELF!

It was only when I looked into Janine's eyes--saw the fear fade, the certainty dawn--that I MOVED.

That I saved him.

WHY?!

WHY DIDN'T YOU LET ME DIE?!

LET ME DIE, DAMN YOU!

LET ME DIE!

LET ME DIE.

No words passed between us. No words were necessary.

We knew, in that moment, that we'd found each other. That we truly were--BROTHERS. Born of the same cells.

Possessed of the same heart.

In one astonishing night, the world was TRANSFORMED: a man who'd dedicated his life to DESTROYING me--had SAVED me.

And I, in turn...

BEN!

...had saved him.

YOU DID THE RIGHT THING, BEN.

YOU ALWAYS DO THE RIGHT THING.

AND NOW--IT'S TIME FOR ME TO DO IT, TOO.

WHAT DO YOU--?

I'M DONE RUNNING, BEN.

I'M GIVING MYSELF UP.

NO! WE WERE GOING AWAY! WE WERE GOING TO MAKE A NEW START!

THIS IS A NEW START.

BACK ON THE ROOF... YOU TOLD KAINE THAT YOU HAD TO TAKE HIM IN.

THAT HE HAD TO FACE HIS PAST--

--IF HE EVER WANTED TO FIND PEACE.

I WANT PEACE, BEN. MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD--I WANT PEACE--

--FOR BOTH OF US.

KAINE--?

MY BROTHER SHOWED ME THE WAY. SHOWED ME MYSELF.

HE HELPED ME TAKE THE FIRST HALTING STEP...

...TOWARD REDEEMING MY CORRUPTED SOUL.

FOR THAT, I WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL. FOR THAT...

I--

I SURRENDER.

...I WILL NEVER FORGET HIM.

What Kaine did took extraordinary courage. I knew his road would be a difficult one--he had so much blood on his hands that it would take years to even **BEGIN** washing it away.

But I was determined to **HELP** him. To find a way to slow his cellular degeneration... to tell the people who wanted his head about the horrible circumstances that **MADE** Kaine what he was.

His greatest enemy...

...would become his greatest **ADVOCATE.**

JANINE'S road wouldn't be quite as tortuous--I truly believed that, when the facts were out, she'd find **MERCY;** she'd find **HOPE...**

WHY DID YOU **DO** IT, ELIZABETH?

--STOPPING RUNNING AFTER ALL THESE--

ELIZABETH, CAN YOU TELL US--

...but it wasn't going to be **EASY** for her.

Still I knew, to the bottom of my soul, that my sweet Janine...my sweet **ELIZABETH**...would find her way.

WHY DID YOU GIVE YOURSELF **UP?**

LET'S JUST SAY--

"--THAT I HAD HELP FROM ABOVE."

And as long as I live, I'll love her. As long as I live, I'll be watching OVER her.

Both as BEN REILLY...

...and SPIDER-MAN.

The End